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ABSTRACT

Needs and concerns of 35 black students enrolled at Mansfield University in spring 1985 were assessed. Biographical information and opinions of the respondents were obtained using a questionnaire, which is appended. Characteristics of the sample include: 66.67 percent were males and 33.33 percent were females; 22 of the students were 18 to 21 years old, 9 were 22 to 25 years old, and 4 were 26 to 29 years old; there were 11 freshmen, 9 sophomores, 9 juniors, 5 seniors, and 1 graduate student; more than half of the respondents were in-state, while 31.43 percent were from New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Virgin Islands, and Georgia; and students majored in 15 fields. Students were asked to write what should be done by the university to improve the quality of academic and social/environmental issues concerning black students. Frequently expressed needs included: more black professors and students, more black-related courses and activities, and a black affairs office to handle academic and social adjustment of black students. Twenty-three students felt the black student union served their interests, while 11 said it did not. Students' comments about their needs, the black student union, and the quality of student life are included. (SW)

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Mansfield University

# Expressed needs and concerns of Black students at a small, rural, and predominantly White university

by

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Special Programs/Learning Resource Center
April 1985

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Research Report no. 5

HE 018 202

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*Acknowledgment*

*The author would like to thank the staff of the Department of Special Programs/Learning Resource Center for their assistance in making this project successful. Special thanks to Mr. David Russell for his encouragement in conducting this study, to Ms. Tondelaya K. Baylor-Ayewoh for her active support and concern during this study, and to the Black students and the Black Caucus(professional Black faculty and administrators) at Mansfield University without whose cooperation this project would not be possible.*

## *SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY*

*A list of scientifically generated data-base of the expressed needs and concerns of racial/ethnic minority students at a small, rural, and predominantly White institution of higher education is established. In addition to the administrative and personal use of this data, educators and researchers would find its usefulness in:*

a. *Planning a needs assessment study. This phase of a comprehensive research project would measure the degree of expressed needs of the students based on a Likert-type attitudinal scale.*

b. *Planning action-type research projects/programs. This phase of the research efforts would include seminars, symposia, workshops, and training based on the needs rated high to very high by the students. For example, if the students strongly agree with the statement: "The Black Student Union executives waste too much time in our meetings", then a workshop/training program dealing with parliamentary procedures and effective cum efficient communication strategies would be planned, designed and implemented, and evaluated/ accounted for. The target population for this training would not only include the Black Student Union executives, but also the entire student body at Mansfield University.*

## *OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS*

*Black Caucus:* *A professional group made up of Black administrators and faculty at Mansfield University of Pennsylvania.*

*Black News:* *A monthly newsletter published by the Black Student Union at Mansfield University.*

*Black Students:* *Students whose racial/ethnic affiliation is classsi-fied as Black American (source: Mansfield University Affirmative Action Plan - 1983/84 to 1987/88, vols. I and II.) . The use of racial/ethnic minority students at Mansfield University is synonymous with Black, or American Black of non-Hispanic origin.*

*Expressed Needs and Concerns:* *Actual views and/or opinions of the Black student at Mansfield University, exclusive of his or her implied needs and concerns.*

*MAC:* *Mansfield Activities Council. The purpose of this student organization is "to plan programs for the entire university community; this includes movies, concerts, coffee houses, cultural affairs, and feature arts and forum. MAC also assist other university organizations in planning activities". (source: The Constitution of MAC, 1985).*

*Mansfield University:* *One of the 14 universities belonging to the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. The use of university in this study is synonymous with Mansfield University.*

*Small, Rural, and Predominantly White University:* *Mansfield University with less than three thousand matriculating students(undergraduate and graduate population), is "located in the wooded hills and rolling farm lands of northern Pennsylvania. Its 174 acre campus overlooks the borough of Mansfield and the Tioga River valley where routes U.S. 6 and U.S. 15 cross." (source: The Mansfield University Undergraduate Catalogue, 1983-1985, page 8). About ninety-five percent(95%) of the total student population is White (source: Anonymous, 1984, page 21).*

*WNTE:* *A radio station owned by Mansfield University and operated by the students*

## METHODOLOGY

*Specific Objective of the Study:* To compile a list of the expressed needs and concerns of the Black students at Mansfield University.

*Target Population:* The 75 Black students enrolled at Mansfield University, as of spring semester, 1985.

*Accessible Population:* Black students whose names, local addresses, and telephone numbers appear in the university housing list as of spring semester, 1985. This list was crossed-referenced with the students' mid-term grade cards; a total of 73 students were accessible for this study.

*Sample Selection:* The 73 accessible Black students therefore constituted the frame of study. A 55 percent random sample of this frame, representing 40 students were randomly selected using the table of random numbers. The 40 students therefore represented the sample size.

*Instrumentation:* An open-ended survey instrument, made up of two sections: Biographic Data, and Opinionnaire was designed by the Principal investigator, and pilot tested for clarity, consistency, grammar, and construct. A panel of experts made up of university administrators (including the President of the university), the Black Caucus, faculty and students(White and Black) assisted in debugging the survey instrument. Copies of the revised measuring instrument (see Appendix) were hand-delivered to the 40 students randomly selected for the study. The students were encouraged to return their completed forms to the Principal investigator as indicated in the questionnaire. To guarantee confidentiality, the students were specifically instructed not to write their names anywhere on the survey instruments.

*Usable Data:* Thirty-five of the 40 questionnaires distributed to the students were received; this accounted for an 87.50 percent response rate. All of the data were used in establishing the internal validity of the needs/concerns identification study.

*Analyses of the Data:* The biographic section of the survey instrument was analysed using the percent and frequency statistical procedure. The opinionnaire section was analyzed by combining similar responses to the statements/questions, and thereby compiling a listing of expressed views and reactions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Characteristics of the respondents

Thirty-five out of the 40 students randomly selected for the study returned their survey instrument. This accounted for an 87.5 percent response rate. Five biographic characteristics of the students: sex, age, academic classification, major field of study, and state/place of residence were analyzed.

### Sex

The sexual distribution of the respondents is positively skewed toward the males (Table 1). The disparity in gender group (66.67% males, and 33.33% females) in the study is directly proportional to the composition in the actual target population (Ayewoh, 1985B).

### Age

The age distribution of the respondents is presented in Table 1. Analysis revealed that 22 (62.86%) of the students were between the traditional college age group, 18 to 21 years of age, 9 (25.71%) were 22 to 25 years, and 4 (11.43%) were between 26 and 29 years of age.

### Academic classification

As indicated in Table 1, 11 students, representing 31.43 percent of the respondents were freshmen, 9 (25.71%) sophomores, 9 (25.71%) juniors, 5 (14.29%) seniors, and 1 (2.86%) graduate student. This distribution is very close to the actual target population of Black students (Ayewoh, 1985B).

### State of residence

More than half of the respondents (exactly 68.57 %) were in-state (Table 1). Of the students from Pennsylvania, 13 (54.17%) were from Philadelphia. The remaining 31.43 percent respondents were from : New York (14.29%), New Jersey (8.57%), Massachusetts (2.86%), Virgin Island (2.86%), and Georgia (2.86%) respectively. Four out of the 5 respondents from New York State were from the City.

### Major field of study

Students representing 15 majors at Mansfield responded to the survey.

*Table 1*

*The Distribution of Respondents in the Survey by Sex, Age, Academic classification, and State of Residence of Students*

*(n = 35)*

| Characteristics | Distribution | |
|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percent |
| *SEX* | | |
| Male | 22 | 62.86 |
| Female | 13 | 37.14 |
| *AGE (years)* | | |
| 18 to 21 | 22 | 62.86 |
| 22 to 25 | 9 | 25.71 |
| 26 to 29 | 4 | 11.43 |
| *ACADEMIC CLASSIFICATION* | | |
| Freshman | 11 | 31.43 |
| Sophomore | 9 | 25.71 |
| Junior | 9 | 25.71 |
| Senior | 5 | 14.29 |
| Graduate Student | 1 | 2.86 |
| *STATE OF RESIDENCE* | | |
| Pennsylvania | 24 | 68.57 |
| New York | 5 | 14.29 |
| New Jersey | 3 | 8.57 |
| Massachusetts | 1 | 2.86 |
| * Virgin Island | 1 | 2.86 |
| Georgia | 1 | 2.86 |

* This student was considered a Black American in this study

n= 35 represents the total number of respondents in this study

## EXPRESSED NEEDS AND CONCERNS

Students were instructed to express their opinions regarding these statements:

A. "Write down what you think should be done by Mansfield University to improve the quality of Academic, and Social/ Enviromental issues concerning its Black students?"

The following is a synopsis of their responses:

1. Hire more Black professors and administrators
2. There should be a Black fraternity and sorority
3. More Black issues should be incorporated into various department curricular
4. University administration should be actively involved with the Black Student Union (BSU) in planning and publicizing Black cultural activities
5. White and Black students should be encouraged to participate (through planning and attendance) in Black cultural activities
6. More Black music should be aired on WNTE
7. The university should organize suitable social and academic programs for Black students
8. The university should plan, design, and implement a 'brotherhood day', i.e. a formal social day (inviting White and Black musical and cultural groups, and nationally acclaimed and respectable Black and White educators and politicians) bringing both Black and White students together as brothers and sisters. It was suggested that this special project (to be conducted annually) should be planned by both Black and White students with assistance from the university and downtown communities
9. More Black books, pictures, films, and other instructional materials on campus
10. Hire a Black person to coordinate the cultural activities of the Black student
11. Encourage downtown businesses to market Black social and educational products, such as beauty and cosmetic items, and magazines( Ebony, Jet, and Essence)
12. Actively recruit more Black students

Each of the suggestions/recommendations above were mentioned more than once by the respondents. The views with high frequencies were: more Black professors, more Black students, more Black and related courses and activities, and a Black affairs office to handle the social and academic adjustment/adaptation of the Black students. Some of these findings are in line with the contents/strategies of a national trend toward effecient and cost-effective retention programs for Black students at predominantly White colleges or universities (Anonymous, 1985B).

B. "Indicate your views and/or concerns about the Black Student Union (formerly called International Awareness Association) at Mansfield university."

b.1. "Is the union or association serving your interest?"

summary of response to b.1.

All of the 35 students who returned their questionnaire (87.5% response rate) responded to this question. Twenty-three (65.71%) of them said yes, the union or association is serving my interest, 11 (31.43%) said no, and 1 (2.86%) student wrote in, "I do no know if the union is serving my interest".

For the 23 students who responded in the affirmative. the following is a synopsis of their reactions:

1. The Black Student Union brings in activities that are traditionally enjoyed by all students
2. Does supply entertainment events, but it needs to be more visible
3. The BSU is affiliated with the persons giving me partial scholarship
4. I am a part of an organization that is involved with helping Black students on campus
5. The BSU is involved in planning educational, social, community, and service programs which are enjoyed by both Black and White students
6. BSU is an organization where you do not feel detached from your racial group
7. The union could be one of the most vital student organizations on campus if all the Black students support its activities
8. An organization where I can feel confortable in truely expressing my views, successes, and failures without suffering from the feeling of prejudices
9. Information about free tutorials in Mathematics, Statistics, and English offered by Dr. Mike Ayewoh and many more by the office of Special Programs/ Learning resource Center are announced in our meetings and also publicized in the Black News
10. During our meetings, students share experiences on issues relating to suggested courses to enroll in, the most fair professor to take, and the academic requirements/expectations in each class
11. BSU provides an atmosphere of security and belonginess
12. The union helps the university in identifying some of the concerns and interests of Blacks and designing programs to address some of the issues.

For the 11 students who responded that the Black Student Union is not serving their interests, the following are their reasons:

1. There is no seriousness on the part of the union officers on the proper running of meetings
2. I and some students are made to feel uncomfortable especially when our views differ from those of the student union president
3. Students form cliques in the meetings, and it is often very difficult to break through them when they present issues that are one-sided
4. I feel "discriminated against" by my own people during meetings because of the assumption by some members that my views are childish
5. All students are not fully included in planning the Black Week because the activities are planned by the union executives
6. I do not have the time to waste on an organization that is not well organized
7. The organization is not as strong as it was 4 years ago, especially in mobilizing students to excell, fighting for a just cause, and promoting pride and dignity
8. There is no oneness, and nobody to go to for help, because everybody is busy stabbing each other in the back
9. Students are not really involved in suggesting activities because when you put forth an effort to serve, it is not reciprocated by others
10. Nothing gets accomplished because there are not many Black students involved in the activities
11. Many Black students do not associate with other Black students, and the union officials are not doing anything to rectify this problem
12. Some activities planned by the BSU do not allow for individual and group interraction

The student who did not know if the union is serving him or her (Freshman by academic classification) indicated that he/she has not been invoved in the union because of the need to spend more time establishing a good academic foundation at Mansfield University.

b.2. Students were asked if the Black Student Union receives support from the university.

summary of response to b.2.

Of the 35 students who returned their questionnaires,

only 25 responded to the question of whether or not the union receives support from the university. Five (20%) of these students indicated that the union receives support, another 5 (20%) said the union does not receive support, and the remaining 15 (60%) indicated that they do not know if the union receives support from the university.

Of the students who indicated that the union receives support from the university, the following are the kind of support and the students concerns regarding the quality and quantity of such support:

1. Financial support. Money is provided by the Human Relations Committee, the Student Activities office (this office also provides advice), and MAC, but the union usually go through unnecessary red tape. The funds from the university are not enough to plan and execute suitable programs for the Black students in particular, and all students at Mansfield University in general
2. Programming. The Student Activitity Office is very supportive of our efforts, especially in locating musical and other culturally related groups, negotiating the fianncial and other logistical transactions, and bringing them to the Mansfield University campus. Mr. Clarence Crisp, Director of the Student Activities Office, his staff, and other concerned students have offered their time and resources to the Black History Month, and the Black Week on campus
3. The office of Special Programs/Learning Resource Center offers some assistance in photocoping the Black News (a student newsletter). Tutorial assistance is also provided by this center. Mr. David Russell, Director of the center, and Mrs. Tondelaya Baylor-Ayewoh, a professional counselor also at the center have provided moral, social, and educational support to the Black students. The Black Caucus has presented some of our concerns to the university administration. For example, the Black Caucus helped to institute the Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship that is now funded by the Mansfield University Foundation
4. Individual members of the Black Caucus have contributed food items and other support to the BSU cultural festivities

C. *"How can I, a concerned Black student improve the quality of life (for example: good grades, happy, doing what I love to do best, etc.) for myself, and other Black students at Mansfield University?"*

*summary of response to this question*

*Thirty-three (94.29%) of the 35 students that returned their questionnaires responded to the question of how they can help make Mansfield University a better place for all Black students. The following are the reasons given by the students:*

1. *By recognizing who we are, and working as a united front toward providing solutions to some of our problems*
2. *Individually, and collectively, we should be helping our incoming freshmen and transfer students adjust to life at Mansfield*
3. *By making the Black Student Union a place where we can seriously discuss social issues based on our individual experiences and knowledge*
4. *We should get involved in White fraternities/sororities , such pledging, attending their social events, and so on*
5. *We should get seriously involved in the Student Government Association (SGA) on campus by sending a representative to present our concerns. Encouragement of Black students to run for an SGA office should never be ruled out by Black students*
6. *We should help to set up a Black student affairs office with assistance from the university President. Black students will prefer to graduate from M.U.(instead of droping out, either for personal or academic reasons, Ayewoh, 1985A) if the university is interested in creating a favorable climate for the Black students to truely express themselves*
7. *If we want to bring about solid unity of Black students on campus, we must first present our concerns to the university President. "What is the use of telling students to make Mansfield University a home if the administration is not providing adequate social and academic programs directed at retaining the students?"*
8. *We all should be involved in the Black Student Union, by attending meetings, suggesting ways to make the university a better place for all students; stop criticizing the union executives who put in time, energy, and other resources*
9. *Get involved in the affairs of the Black students especially during orientation, by talking to the*

new students and their parents. In essence, the Black students should form a peer counseling program directed at informing the students and their parents about Mansfield University

10. I am not sure if I can change anything for the good of the Black students, but I am most willing to join others in making the school a better place for all students
11. Working hard (and smart) on achieving academic excellence, and willing to share my knowledge and skills with other students, I can make a significant contribution to the image of Black students at Mansfield
12. By talking to Black students in other schools in Pennsylvania about how they are surviving the minority status in their schools and bringing the success stories to Mansfield University
13. By involving my friends from other universities in our Black Week festivities
14. By joining other Black students to make suggestions to the university president to invite nationally known and respected Black educators to speak to the university student body on race relations
15. To be able to improve the quality of life for the Black students, I would like to see more role models(Black faculty and administrators) on campus, because their presence gives me a sense of purpose, pride, security and confidence
16. As an upper classman, I must set good examples, especially in the way I discipline myself, by attending classes, developing good study habits, conducting myself well in social gatherings, and believing in the equality of all God's people
17. Helping to publicize the activities of the Black Student Union, especially to my white friends, and my professors
18. By developing a buddy system whereby we become our brother and sister's keeper in the area of academics, athletics, and social adjustment at Mansfield
19. Inform and follow up on freshman and other students having serious academic difficulties that it takes hard work, perseverance, flexibility, dedication, and creativity to survive at Mansfield University
20. Students, especially freshmam must be continuously told that they must love themselves, and do what they do best to survive anywhere in the world
21. Keep clean , work hard, develop a positive image, and stay out of trouble
22. By organizing Black Alumni Visitation Program with the help of other Blacks and the university

community

23. By responding to these questions (refering to this needs identification research project), I am sharing my ideas with other students, and I do hope that the results of this research would be published in the Black News, the Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education, and copies sent to the university president and the various departments on campus

## SUMMARY and CONCLUSION

The Black students who responded to the survey were predominantly males, between the ages of 18 and 21 years, and residents of Pennsylvania. Since this distribution of the respondents was representative of the the actual target population, the findings of this research could be generalized to the entire Black student population at Mansfield University of pennsylvania.

The needs, concerns and views expressed by the Black students currently enrolled at Mansfield University ranged from academic through athletics, to cultural, enviromental, and social factors. Majority of the students do not know if the Black Student Union receives support from the university, but the few that do know indicated that more efforts by the university in the area of program planning, design and execution of activities, funds, visibility, and institutional commitments would be needed to retain the students. However, the students expressed that they were aware of some of the limitations of the university, and that individual and collective efforts on their part are needed catalyst in achieving desirable institutional reform. It is interesting to note that the report on "Equality and Excellence: The Educational Status of Black Americans" prepared for the College Board by Linda Darling-Hammond, a Rand Corporate Researcher, revealed that "the needs of minority-group students and the effects that proposed reform would have on them have been ignored" (Anonymous, 1985A:1). We would like to subscribe to a school of thought that it is the responsibility of any institution of post-secondary education with racial/ethnic minority student population to work in collaboration with the latter in identifying, assessing and evaluating an overall needs and concerns of students, and to judiciously establish a realitic and pragmatic set of priorities. The decision as to what constitutes a priority is not always simple, particularly when most of the identified needs and concerns are multiferous and pressing. Nevertheless, top priority should be given to issues which, by their resolution, will create the greatest amount of satisfaction for the Black students as any other racial/ethnic minority students and, at the same time, exert a desirable influence on all students, faculty, staff, and

*administrators at Mansfield University. We are, therefore, cautiously optimistic that the needs and concerns expressed by students in this research would be given immediate analyses by the university administration and all concerned parties, because the "issues raised by Blacks challenge the whole of the American educational system" (Hall, 1970:1) and its survivability.*

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*APPENDIX*

*SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE:*

*Identifying the Needs and Concerns of Black Students*

*MANSFIELD UNIVERSITY*

*Identifying the Needs, Views, and Concerns of Black Students*

*Instructions:* *Please answer all questions to the best of your opinion, knowledge, and ability.*

*Note:* *DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ANYWHERE ON THIS FORM*

*Section One: Biographic Data*

*SEX:*
*( ) Male* *( ) Female*

*AGE:*
*(Please write down your age .....years)*

*ACADEMIC CLASSIFICATION:*
*( ) Freshman ( ) Sophomore ( ) Junior ( ) Senior*

*MAJOR FIELD OF STUDY:*
*(Please write down your major .....)*

*PLACE OF RESIDENCE:*
*(Please indicate where you live during your holidays. For example, if you live in Philadelphia during your holidays, your place of residence is Philadelphia. Now, my place of residence is .....)*

*Section Two: Your opinion*

*There are no Right or Wrong answers here. Please indicate your own views, concerns, and needs concerning the information below:*

*A. Write down what you think should be done by Mansfield University to improve the quality of ACADEMIC, and SOCIAL/ENVIROMENTAL issues concerning its Black students.*

*ACADEMIC:*

*SOCIAL/ENVIROMENTAL:*

*Please turn to page 2*

B. Indicate your views and/or concerns about the Black Student Union (International Awareness Association) at Mansfield University:

1. Is the union or association serving your interest?
( ) yes ( ) no

If your answer is YES, how is it serving your interest?

If your answer is NO, why do you think it is NOT serving your interest?

2. Does the union or association receive support from University?
( ) yes ( ) no ( ) I do not know

If your answer is YES, indicate what kind of support ( example: assist in planning programs with the union or association, provide funds, and so on)

C. How can I, a concerned Black student, improve the quality of life ( example: good grades, happy, doing what I love to do best, and so on) for myself and other Black students at Mansfield University?

.....

Please return your completed form to Dr. Mike E. Ayewoh, Beecher House, not later than March 31, 1985.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH